

School-based sexual education

Literature review updated April 2012.

As part of WSIPP's research approach to identifying evidence-based programs and policies, WSIPP determines "what works" (and what does not work) to improve outcomes using an approach called meta-analysis. For detail on our methods, see our [technical documentation](#). At this time, WSIPP has not yet calculated benefits and costs for this topic.

Program Description: School-based sex education curricula provide information about and instruct students in skills for sexual abstinence; many programs also provide students information about birth control and ways to protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STD). We did not include programs that focused only on HIV or STD risk reduction because we focused on the prevention of teen pregnancy. We analyzed 14 studies of abstinence-only programs and comprehensive sexual health programs and found no significant differences ($p=.65$) in effects on teens initiating sexual activity; only comprehensive programs measured pregnancy outcomes. Usually the programs lasted less than 2 months, however, a few were offered over 2 school years. Students were typically middle-school to early high school age and most programs were lead by teachers who received training in the curriculum. An exception was abstinence-only programs, which were usually offered by trained outside facilitators and trained student peer-leaders. Programs evaluated included Draw the Line/Respect the Line (Coyle 2004), Safer Choices (Coyle 2001), Reducing the Risk (Barth 1992), Sexual Health and Relationships (Henderson 2007), Promoting Health Among Teens comprehensive education (Jermmott 2010), Project Taking Charge (Jorgenson 1991), McMasters Teen Program (Mitchell-DiCenso 1997), Randomized Intervention Trial of Pupil Led Sex Education (Stephenson 2008), It's Your Game: Keep It Real (Tortolero 2009), Managing Pressures Before Marriage (Blake 2001), For Keeps (Borawski 2005), Skills and Knowledge for AIDS and Pregnancy Prevention (Kirby 1997), and abstinence education (Treholm 2007).

Meta-Analysis of Program Effects

Outcomes measured	Primary or secondary participant	No. of effect sizes	Unadjusted effect size (random effects model)		Adjusted effect sizes and standard errors used in the benefit-cost analysis					
					First time ES is estimated			Second time ES is estimated		
			ES	p-value	ES	SE	Age	ES	SE	Age
Teen pregnancy (under age 18)	Primary	4	0.011	0.859	-0.005	0.059	17	-0.005	0.059	27
Initiation of sexual activity	Primary	8	-0.099	0.153	-0.073	0.066	15	-0.073	0.066	25

Citations Used in the Meta-Analysis

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